

Petrides (A.K.) *Menander, New Comedy and the Visual*. Pp. xii + 322, ills. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Cased, £65, US\$99. ISBN: 978-1-107-06843-8.

This book is a sophisticated, theoretical, and dense treatment of Menander, and a work of this kind has been lacking. It is encouraging that scholars are turning their attention to the potential for New Comedy to be literature alongside reconstructive and philological work. Petrides must be congratulated for the ‘new look’ (pun intended) he has given Menander. But this review must also level serious criticism at the work as a whole, and at some of its component parts. Petrides’ favourite method of analysis is the case-study; what is sometimes lacking are summaries (or statements) of what he thinks the case-studies have shown. As a result, one frequently feels drowned in deep, sophisticated analysis without quite knowing what Petrides is asking one to think. Of course, this is because the potential spectator is more interesting for Petrides than the playwright (cf. e.g. 53-54); but Menander was also a spectator of drama, as well as the person shaping the plays we have. The question whether Menander saw Petrides’ parallel (53-58) between *Dysk.* 345-392 and *E. Ba.* 802ff. is thus still valid (and, in this particular case, doubtful, in my view). I can imagine going back to this book for comment on individual passages, while being less convinced by the thesis as a whole.

Those eager to find a summary of the book’s main ideas might start at 246, which explains the connection between *opsis*, which in Petrides’ hands is a system of allusion between potentially meaningful visual cues, and *logos*, which for Petrides is the somewhat parallel system of intertextual connections with earlier drama. Menander’s literary density is created by the interaction between these two modes.

The book is curiously structured: chapters are long, and comprise an introduction, a first chapter on intertextuality, a second on Hellenistic performance culture, two on the mask, and a final chapter on Roman comedy in lieu of conclusion. These are divided into subsections sometimes by headings (some of which are numbered), sometimes by asterisks. It is not clear how these divisions differ from each other, indeed how they relate to each other. Signposts are given from time to time, but it is then unclear how they relate to subsequent sections: at 115, Petrides introduces ‘standardisation’ and ‘semiotisation’, but the immediate section after that is ‘The case of space’ (117 ff.) only moving on to ‘standardisation’ at 130.

Cross-references are infuriatingly vague (‘see Chapter 4’, 96 n. 39 and 97 n. 41; or ‘Gorgias and the *agroikos*’ at 167, for which we are referred to ‘Chapter 2’, and for which the index only provides the right reference, 151, under ‘masks, New Comedy’), which makes drawing out links in Petrides’ argument well-nigh impossible for all but the most dogged of readers. Nor do they always help the case: Pollux on 131 is said to square ‘well enough with the archaeological record’, and we are referred to ‘the beginning of this chapter’; this ‘beginning’ seems to be a section over ten pages into the chapter, in which late antique sources are viewed, in fact, with due scepticism (97). Similarly, Petrides invokes Aeschylus’ *Niobe* as an intertext for an Antioch mosaic of *Perikeiromene* (87-88). This is then applied without further ado to the text of the play (88); but this once again falls foul of Petrides’ dictum that ‘we cannot determine for certain...whether...the Antioch mosaic do[es] not reflect any actual performance at all’ (97 again).

Textual interpretations are not always signalled as being as controversial as they are. Thus it is not clear that Smikrines is *obligated* to marry Kleostratos’ sister, only that he *may*; thus the question is not one of ‘upholding the law’, or of ‘an affront of Nomos against Physis’, rather the law is being applied by a wicked man to further his personal wealth (26-7). Similarly, Daos does not call the *epikleros* laws ‘barbaric’, rather he notes that he, as a barbarian should not be commenting on them (33).

Knemon's reflects on 'the reasons for his seclusion' cannot be said to be absent from *Dyskolos* given the missing section of his speech with, presumably, just this information (39). Had Polemon in *Pk.* seen Glykera hugging Moschion (85), the conclusion he jumped to would have been correct; rather, his interpretation was wrong because he saw Moschion hugging Glykera. I wonder how Petrides knows that Daos entered in 'stony silence' in *Aspis* (88); we do not have the beginning of the play, nor would we know the extent to which the shield was immediately the focus, nor do we know whether the procession looked like a funerary procession rather than a display of spoils. By translating δεισιδαιμονῆσαι and ἐλέω to produce 'fear' and 'pity' (thus underlined), he obscures the Greek text's lack of parallelism with Aristotle's theorising of tragedy (100). A long extract of Plutarch (105-6) turns out to be cited because it accords 'very well with developments in the Hellenistic period' (106), but leaves one wondering what the Hellenistic evidence itself is actually like. On staging, the central door of the comic stage is 'inevitably reminiscent' (120) of tragedy, but at the same time something which Menander 'can draw metatheatrical attention' to, suggesting choice; in any case, Petrides argument requires a character to use a paratragic term (ἐν παραστά[σιν δόμων], *Sik.* 169) before the tragic intertext can be activated: hardly a compelling case of 'intervisuality'.

Bibliographical information is not always cited carefully: 'have long been recognised' on 37 could have referred to R. L. Hunter, *The New Comedy of Greece and Rome* (1985) p. 173 or C. Lape, *Reproducing Athens* (2004) p. 115; Ruffell is curiously upbraided at 43 for not citing Menander in a book that addressed fictionality in Aristophanes. I was puzzled to find no reference to D. Bain, *Actors and Audience. A Study of Asides and Related Conventions in Greek Drama* (1977). The symbolism of water in *Dyskolos* has been 'suggested before', but it is not clear whether this is a reference to Petrides' own work or someone else's.

Petrides' thesis is sophisticated; but I am not convinced that it represents a promising direction. What it fails to capture, ironically, is what audiences saw in Menander; why did Aristophanes of Byzantium ask 'which of you imitated the other' of Life and Menander? Petrides essentially rejects this sort of direct evidence for audience (or reader?) reaction in favour of a more speculative approach. Comparative perspectives might have been more helpful; all too often we upbraid Menander for unrealistic or logically unsatisfactory endings we would only too happily tolerate as part of a modern sitcom (Petrides at 14 contrasts modern and ancient concepts of realism, but modern realism itself needs more specific handling).

I give the minor misprints and mistakes I have detected: xi, *Kolax* is cited from Arnott 1996b; 13, para 2, line 3, delete 'it'; 35, 6 lines from the end, ποιῆσαι; 125, second line from end, insert 'about' after 'aura'; 162, line 6 end, missing accents; 166, penultimate line, read 'so' for 'as'; 189, for 'explicitly' read surely 'implicitly'; 237, last line, delete full stop before 'it'.

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